Leave No One Behind: The Forum of International Respiratory Societies calls for equitable access to prevention and treatment on World Lung Day 2023

25 September 2023

This World Lung Day, September 25, the Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is calling on governments and healthcare providers worldwide to give equitable access to preventative services and treatments for respiratory conditions, and lifesaving pneumonia vaccines for children.

The theme for this year’s World Lung Day is “Access to Prevention and Treatment for All. Leave No One Behind,” reflecting the commitment to equity that is at the heart of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

This commitment is especially crucial given that 80% of non-communicable disease-related deaths occur in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). This huge health burden could be prevented by implementing cost-effective interventions, such as vaccination against pneumonia and improved access to preventative services and inhaled medicines.

"World Lung Day 2023 is one of the best opportunities to raise global awareness of lung health," says Dr David CL Lam, President of FIRS and the Asian Pacific Society of Respirology (APSR).

"The challenge to respiratory health, especially in LMICs, is evident. There is a clear lack of equal access to preventive measures, such as smoking cessation, and to effective inhaler therapies for managing asthma and COPD.

“The availability of inhaler therapies is far from the target of achieving 80% availability of essential medicines to combat non-communicable diseases, including asthma, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and lung cancer. Healthcare access equity is equally crucial for respiratory infections, including tuberculosis. Through equal access to early detection, treatment can begin as soon as possible, effectively reducing the health burden of both respiratory infections and non-communicable respiratory conditions."

FIRS has identified three key target areas to tackle inequalities in the fight against respiratory disease: Improving access to preventative services and stop-smoking treatments, expanding access to devices and inhalation therapies and strengthening access to effective pneumonia vaccines for children. Despite global progress in pneumonia vaccine access, 40% of infants are still left behind.

To reduce the global burden of respiratory diseases, it's crucial to take action in these key areas.

Access to preventative services and stop-smoking treatments

- Smoking tobacco is the leading cause of respiratory diseases, including chronic obstructive pulmonary disease (COPD), lung cancer and asthma, and increases the risk of respiratory infections, such as pneumonia and tuberculosis.
• Exposure to tobacco smoke harms children even before birth. Reducing exposure to tobacco smoke helps improve children’s long-term lung health.
• Educational, counselling, and pharmacological interventions for smoking cessation are effective. They should be available for anyone who smokes.

Expanding access to devices and inhalation therapies
• Effective and essential inhaled medicines for treating asthma and COPD are often unavailable and unaffordable in LMICs. We need urgent collective global action to achieve WHO’s target of 80% availability of essential medicines to treat major non-communicable diseases. ii
• Respiratory devices and inhalational therapies, including oxygen therapy, should be available to anyone who is affected.

Access for all children to effective, affordable preventive interventions for pneumonia
• Pneumonia is the leading cause of death from infection in children worldwide. Prevention is vital as any severe lower respiratory tract infection can affect lung development.
• Vaccines are critically important to prevent bacterial and viral cases of pneumonia, reducing illness, death and national healthcare expenditure. They should be a priority for all children and adults. iii
• Access to newer vaccines especially pneumococcal conjugate vaccine (PCV) must be strengthened. While it is encouraging to see global progress in PCV coverage, 40% of infants are still missing out iv.
• Full coverage of PCV can prevent the death of 1.6m children under 5 years by 2030 v.

“Through World Lung Day 2023, FIRS is determined to take up the role of advocating equal access to prevention and treatment for respiratory diseases. We can reduce the global burden of respiratory diseases, leaving no one behind,” said Dr Lam, “But we need to act now.”

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Further information
• Join the Forum of International Respiratory Societies’ World Lung Day webinar on ‘Access to Prevention and Treatment for All’ on September 25th at 1pm CET. Register here.
• Visit the World Lung Day toolkit for more on events, graphics, resources and sign up to be a World Lung Day Partner.
• The Global Impact of Respiratory Disease report outlines major causes of respiratory disease, including lung cancer, and lays out recommendations for global action.
About the Forum of International Respiratory Societies

The Forum of International Respiratory Societies (FIRS) is a collaborative organization consisting of the world's foremost international respiratory societies. Comprising over 70,000 members globally, FIRS is dedicated to advancing lung health on a global scale.

FIRS is composed of prestigious respiratory societies, including the American College of Chest Physicians (CHEST), American Thoracic Society (ATS), the Asian Pacific Society of Respirology (APSR), Asociación Latino Americana De Tórax (ALAT), European Respiratory Society (ERS), International Union Against Tuberculosis and Lung Diseases (The Union), Pan African Thoracic Society (PATS), the Global Initiative for Asthma (GINA), and the Global Initiative for Chronic Obstructive Lung Disease (GOLD).

1 https://www.who.int/publications/i/item/9789240043596
2 https://www.thelancet.com/journals/langlo/article/PIIS2214-109X(22)00330-8/fulltext
5 https://immunizationdata.who.int/pages/coverage/PCV.html?CODE=Global&ANTIGEN=PCV3&YEAR=